SUPPORTING

Immigrants and Immigration to Alberta

AN OVERVIEW

Alberta
Government

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Introduction

Immigrants helped build this province and they continue to make valuable contributions to Alberta's economic, social and cultural life. Immigrants are vital to sustaining the prosperity and continued development of Alberta's economy, now and in the future.

Alberta's strong economy has placed high demands on our labour force resulting in skill shortages. Without the right number of people with the right kinds of skills to fill these shortages, the province's overall economic growth could be seriously hampered.

In this document, the word **immigrant** refers to individuals who are legally entitled to enter and remain permanently in Canada, and therefore may meet the requirements to apply for Canadian Citizenship. This policy does not address temporary foreign workers, who temporarily work in Alberta under the federal Temporary Foreign Worker Program.

Alberta's immigration policy, *Supporting Immigrants and Immigration to Alberta,* contributes to an existing three-pronged government strategy to address skill shortages.

1. Increase the skill and knowledge levels of Albertans.
2. Facilitate the mobility of labour in Canada.
3. Increase the number of immigrants to Alberta.

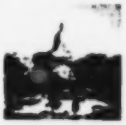
Supporting Immigrants and Immigration to Alberta responds to the third strategy, to increase the number of immigrants to Alberta. The policy outlines a coordinated and comprehensive approach to attracting and retaining immigrants to Alberta.

The specific initiatives in *Supporting Immigrants and Immigration to Alberta* will be pursued within the existing roles and responsibilities of the federal and provincial governments[1].

1. Under the Canadian constitution, immigration is an area of federal and provincial jurisdiction with federal paramountcy. The federal government determines who is admitted and the overall number of immigrants coming to Canada. The federal government also co-funds settlement services with provincial governments. Within this framework, Alberta can play a significant role in attracting immigrants and ensuring their ability to fully participate in their local communities with federal paramountcy.

Alberta's Vision of Immigration

- Immigrants and their families choose to live in Alberta, where they are able to fully participate in community life and are valued for their cultural, economic and social contributions.



Attracting and Retaining Immigrants to Alberta

Immigration is not new to Alberta or to the country as a whole. However, there is increased competition for immigrants within Canada and internationally, making it necessary to enhance the attraction and retention of immigrants to Alberta.

The Alberta government will promote Alberta as a safe, prosperous place to live, work and raise a family. Along with its community partners, government will work to improve settlement services for immigrants and their families. Ensuring immigrants have the ability to be full participants in Alberta society, will increase the likelihood that they will chose to move to and remain in the province.

Government will also look at ways to reduce employment barriers facing immigrants such as expanding efforts to recognize foreign credentials and skills acquired abroad, and help with lack of Canadian work experience, and gaps in language and technical skills required for employment in Alberta.

Supporting Immigrants and Immigration to Alberta, is a long-range policy that strikes a balance between the social, cultural and economic needs of immigrants.

The Need for Immigration

Over the past 20 years, Alberta's economy has grown at an average annual rate of 3.7%

Alberta is enjoying the strongest economic growth of any province in Canada. To sustain this growth, Alberta requires an adequate supply of workers with the right knowledge and skills. Most immigrants who move to Alberta are well educated. In 2004, 48% held a university degree which is up from 33% in 1996, 5% held a trade certificate, and 11% held a non-university diploma.

Alberta may face a shortage of 100,000 workers over the next ten years

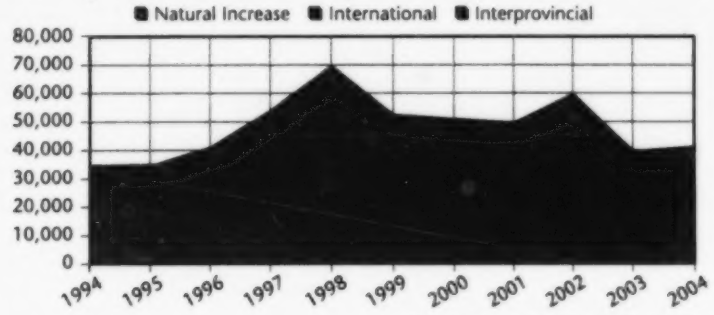
Alberta is facing a number of demographic challenges – an aging population, low birthrate, urbanization, and decreased interprovincial migration – all of which will affect our ability to meet the labour force demands of a prosperous economy.

In Alberta, 28 out of 53 occupational groups report an unemployment rate of less than 3% which is a strong indication of skill shortages. Alberta's unemployment rate has been the lowest in the country for over a year, reaching a record low of 3.4% in July, 2005. Alberta's low unemployment rate is an indicator of a tight labour market where the growth of the labour force is not keeping pace with employment growth.

Employers are having difficulty finding people to fill various jobs. Shortages are especially severe in health care, information and communications technology, construction, agriculture, food processing and tourism/hospitality.

The situation may become even more critical over the next decade. Human Resources and Employment preliminary forecasts report that 400,000 new jobs will be created in Alberta between 2004 and 2014. At the same time, it is anticipated that only 300,000 new workers will enter the labour market. This may result in a shortage of 100,000 workers.

Components of Alberta Population Growth, 1994 - 2004



Source: Alberta Finance, Statistics Canada

Small-and large-scale projects are at risk if we do not find enough people to fill this shortage

There are over $100 billion worth of capital projects planned or underway in this province. If Alberta does not attract enough people with the knowledge and skills to fill our labour shortages, many of these projects will have to be delayed or abandoned. This would damage Alberta's international reputation and hurt future efforts to promote further investment.

FAST FACTS

Independent-class immigrants who came as entrepreneurs invested over $10 M in 2002 and contributed over 200 full- and part-time jobs in Alberta.

Immigrants provide essential linkages between provincial and international economies. Estimates show that a 10% increase in immigration is correlated with a 1% increase in exports.

Supporting Immigrants and Immigration to Alberta

In order to attract and retain more immigrants to Alberta, there are four key strategic directions:

1. Welcoming communities. Support communities as they work towards achieving their goals for welcoming and being inclusive of immigrants and their families.
2. Attracting immigrants to Alberta. Increase the number of immigrants accepted to Canada who choose to live in Alberta.
3. Living in Alberta. Expand the programs and services that integrate immigrants and their families into daily life, so they can successfully live, work and learn in Alberta.
4. Working in Alberta. Help immigrants access labour market opportunities.

The policy is a coordinated approach involving a number of Ministries, as immigration issues are interlinked with workforce needs, settlement services, health, economic development and housing.

Following are the specific objectives associated with these strategic directions. To put these four directions into context, a few examples of actions are provided for illustrative purposes only.

1. WELCOMING COMMUNITIES

Objective: ***Immigrants have the opportunity to participate fully in the social, cultural and economic life of the province, without discrimination.***

Strategies:

- Develop resources and programs that increase Albertans' awareness, understanding and appreciation of human rights, multiculturalism, and diversity, and that remove barriers to full participation by immigrants.
- Expand the support provided to organizations for developing the capacity they need to help build communities and workplaces that are fair and inclusive, respect human rights, and welcome immigrants from diverse cultures and religious traditions.

2. ATTRACTING IMMIGRANTS TO ALBERTA

Objective: ***The proportion of Canadian immigrants landing in Alberta increases to 10%, resulting in a minimum of 24,000 immigrants to Alberta per year (compared to a total of 16,469 immigrants to Alberta in 2004).***

Strategies:

- Develop a permanent federal-provincial agreement on the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) that has more flexibility and increases the number of nominees to meet employer demand.
- Develop a coordinated marketing strategy to increase awareness about Alberta and position the province as a preferred destination for immigrants.
- Develop a comprehensive "Immigrate to Alberta" website to provide a single-window access point for information for immigrants. In addition link to "Study in Alberta" that promotes Alberta learning systems and opportunities to study in the province.

Objective: ***A strategy is developed to facilitate permanent residency for international students completing studies in Alberta who want to remain permanently in the province.***

Strategies:

- Reach an agreement with the federal government to allow international students to work off campus while studying, to increase the attraction of living and working in Alberta.

3. LIVING IN ALBERTA

Objective: ***Immigrants receive the community supports necessary to successfully settle in and adapt to Alberta society.***

The retention rate in Alberta – the percentage of immigrants who remain in Alberta after initially landing here – increases to 85%.

Strategies:

- Increase the capacity of settlement services and language training programs to meet increasing demand in primary destination cities (e.g., Calgary, Edmonton).
- Increase access to English as a second language (ESL), build settlement services capacity and increase access to literacy programming to adult immigrants in Alberta's smaller centres and rural areas.
- Build upon existing services to develop a continuum of language training programs that have the flexibility to meet the diverse needs of various immigrants – skilled immigrants, low skilled immigrants, school children, older persons, etc.

4. WORKING IN ALBERTA

Objective: ***Immigrants' qualifications and skills gained outside Alberta are recognized and utilized.***

Strategies:

- Expand efforts to work with regulatory bodies to develop innovative assessment frameworks that recognize foreign credentials as well as skills and work experience gained abroad, reducing the time required to complete the assessment.
- Work with post-secondary institutions and others to develop new, effective approaches to address identified gaps in immigrant skills and knowledge.
- Expand current activities to attract, license and retain doctors, pharmacists, nurses and other health care professionals.

Objective: ***Alberta employers are able to benefit from immigration as one way to address skills shortages.***

Strategies:

- Expand the delivery of the Foreign Worker Readiness Seminars to provide employers and communities throughout the province with the knowledge and tools required to attract and retain workers trained abroad.
- Work more closely with employers to increase their understanding of internationally acquired skills and work experience. Support a strategy of diversity in meeting employers need for skilled workers (e.g., through wider circulation of publications such as Diversity: A strategy to meet your need for skilled workers).

Guiding principles for immigration to Alberta

In making this vision a reality, the Government of Alberta will be guided by the following principles:

- ***Community-Based, Alberta Approach.*** Each community has unique needs. The Government of Alberta will work with community stakeholders as they explore immigration as a possible method to build and sustain their communities.
- ***Collaborative.*** Given the wide variety of interests affected by immigration matters, the Government of Alberta is committed to work with partners, such as the federal government, municipal governments, employers, settlement service providers, immigrant advocacy groups, regulatory bodies and professional associations, post-secondary institutions, health service providers, labour organizations, employment service providers, and religious, ethnic and voluntary community service groups.
- ***Fair and Inclusive.*** Inclusiveness means more than being friendly or hospitable. It means providing access to employment opportunities and removing barriers to immigrants' full participation as equal citizens in all aspects of community life.
- ***Holistic.*** Immigrants are valued for more than their economic contributions. A holistic approach is required, which addresses the needs of the entire family and recognizes the contributions immigrants make to Alberta's social and cultural life.
- ***Sustainable.*** Immigrants are valued for their long-term contributions. The investment we make in education, language training and settlement services today not only supports the contributions of immigrants, but also their children, grandchildren and future generations.
- ***Accountable.*** The Government of Alberta will release an annual accountability report on this strategy.

SUPPORTING IMMIGRANTS AND IMMIGRATION IN ALBERTA

One element of the Government of Alberta's strategy for addressing the skilled labour shortage is a made in Alberta approach to supporting immigrants and immigration. By developing community and workplace partnerships, the Government will be able to implement and build on the four strategic directions, resulting in a coordinated long-term policy and program approach to immigrants and immigration in Alberta. This is critical to meeting dynamic labour force demands as our province continues to grow. It is also essential for ensuring that Alberta and its citizens, new and old, are able to enjoy a superior quality of life and remain confident about the future for themselves and their children.

Prepared by:
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For more information on the policy, immigrants and immigration please visit www.gov.ab.ca/hre/immigration